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Landscaping Your Home

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landscaping your home



Cooperative Extension Service
South Dakota State University
U.S. Department of Agriculture

landscaping your home

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You can make your home grounds more attractive, whether you live in town, city, or country. The terms landscaping, home beautification, and home grounds improvement describe such a project or activity. For our use in this fact sheet, landscaping can be defined as purposeful planning, planting, and construction to create desired effects.

The purpose of landscape planning is to assure maximum convenience and satisfaction for the homeowner. Plant materials and other features are used to provide beauty, interest, comfort, and enjoyment.

The plant materials available for use in landscaping include turfgrasses, trees, shrubs, flowers, and vines, each serving some certain purpose and providing some special effect. Non-plant features are such things as walks, decks, and fences.

Relationship of home and grounds

The center of your landscaping plan is your home. You will want plantings around it to frame it and enhance the total impression you want to give people viewing your property. Your plantings should complement the design and construction features of your house.

You also need a landscape scene that looks good from the inside, that provides attractive views from the major windows.

In the case of rural homes, families usually want all outbuildings visible from some room in the house for safety's

sake. In town or city you may want to isolate yourself from nearby homes, or you may want to complement already existing attractive neighborhood features.

An important feature to put into your landscape plan is an area of privacy. Here, plantings screen you from sudden intrusions, here you can carry on some favorite activities—entertaining, barbecuing, a few hours of reading. Here are grouped your own reasons you like to be outdoors.

You also have to be practical. You may need to fit in a clothesline and a play area that is visible from major rooms in the house. You don't want tree roots growing into your sewer system or water lines, and you don't want to top out a tree because it was planted under utility wires.

Now is the time, before you pick up a shovel or buy a rosebush, to decide how you would like your home and grounds to look. Get prepared to spend a few pleasant hours devising a complete landscape plan.

You won't achieve your plan's goal overnight—after all, plants take time to grow. You may have a 1-, 2-, or 3-year plan, but as you add to your landscaping every year, you will take growing pleasure in the appearance of your home, yard, and garden.

Climate control

Landscaping is one way we can do something about the weather. You can modify the climate around your home by the plant

materials you select.

The location of shelterbelts, shade trees and shrubs; the planting of turf or other ground cover; and the placement of walks and drives all influence the home environment. Give this some thought when making your plans.

Protect farmsteads by planting shelterbelts on the sides that face the prevailing winter winds. Check with the local Soil Conservation Service office for assistance with farmstead windbreaks.

Place shade trees near the south and west sides of the house to shade the home in summer but also to allow warm sunshine to come through in winter. As a rule of thumb, the trees should be 15-20 feet from the roof line. Place other shade trees for balance, accent, and interest. Use turf or other ground covers and the proper placement of walks and drives to control the reflection of the sun where possible.

Access

In placing walks and drives, utility and beauty can be developed together. Plan them wide enough to accommodate expected traffic and lead it directly to the desired entrance or area. Allow a spacing of 4 to 6 feet between the house foundation and walks to allow adequate room for shrub and flower foundation plantings.

The monotony of straight walks and drives can be relieved by using pleasing curves combined with unusual plant materials.

Take care in placing shrubs near drives—they can create a snow trap in winter, an inconvenience if snow removal is a problem.

Preparing a landscape plan

The most necessary ingredient in your landscape project is not a particular tree, shrub, or certain flower, but a complete plan.

The plan is a scale drawing for planning your home grounds landscape improvements. It will help you avoid mistakes that may grow too big to be removed later. You can check with the plan in future years to see that you're still following the principles of good design and plant maintenance.

It is difficult to carry out a successful landscape improvement program without a detailed plan and plant list.

Drawing the plan

Draw your plan on a large sheet of drafting paper. Choose a workable scale of size. Prepared drawing sheets are often lined in a scale of one inch equaling 10 or 20 feet. These are convenient scales to use. However, any similar scale is suitable provided it is carefully observed.

First, draw in the boundaries of the home grounds and other existing features—house, garage, walks, drives, trees, shrubs, clothesline, etc. Show underground and overhead wires and lines. You may have to do some checking on this. Indicate the scale used and the compass direction “north” on your plan. Draw all items, measurements, and distances as near to true-scale size as possible.

All non-plant features added to the plan should be drawn to their actual scale size. For plant features (particularly trees and shrubs), draw them to represent their mature diameter size. Since the plan provides only a top or overhead view, only horizontal measurements can be shown.

Step No. 1— Utility needs

Next, draw in utility items on the landscape plan (Fig 1). In the case of the rural home, provide adequate, properly located parking and turn-around space.

Locate the clothesline in the service or utility area as close as practical to the laundry room door, but as inconspicuously as possible. The best clothesline

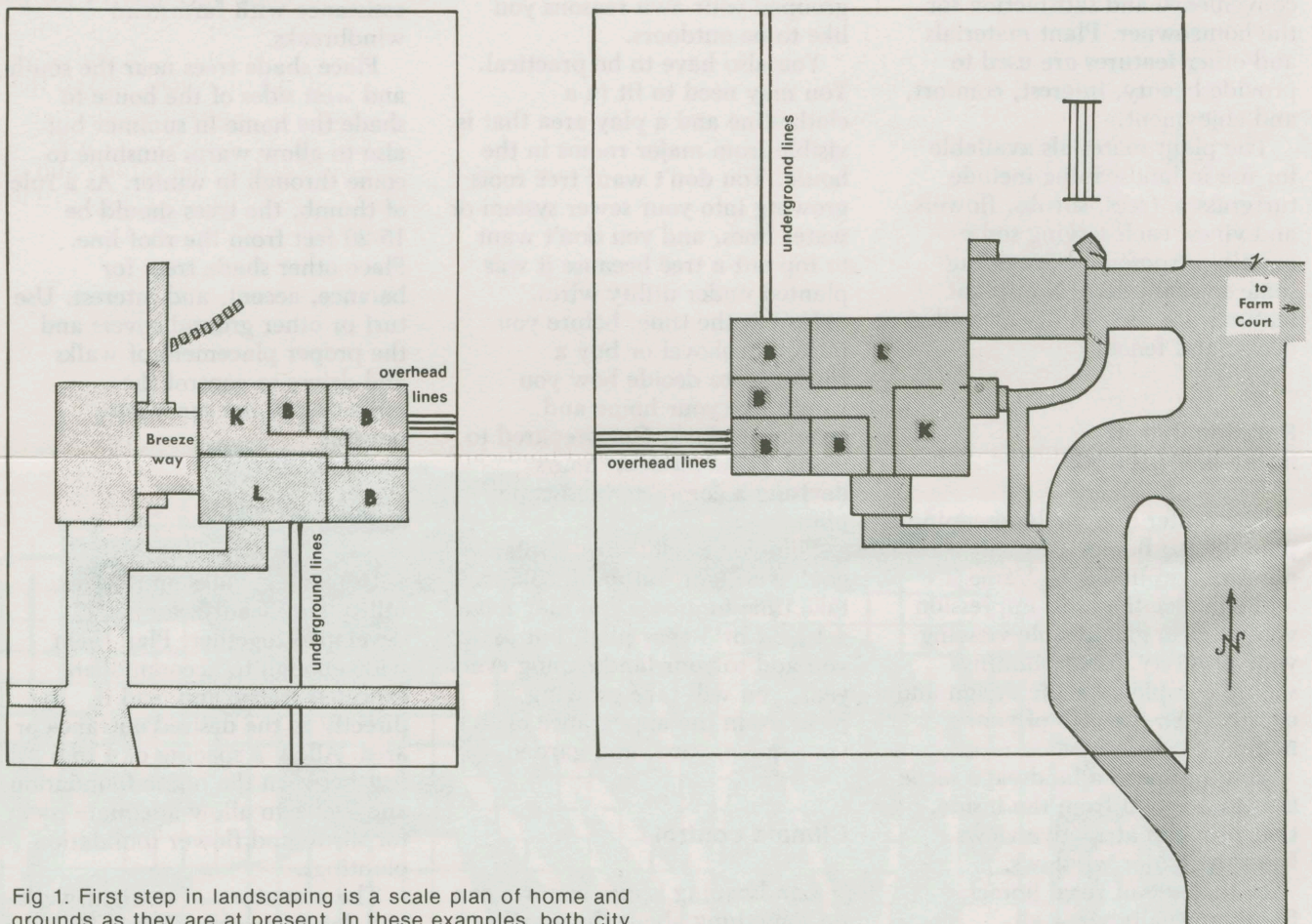


Fig 1. First step in landscaping is a scale plan of home and grounds as they are at present. In these examples, both city home (left) and farm home (right) are assumed to be new dwellings with no plantings.

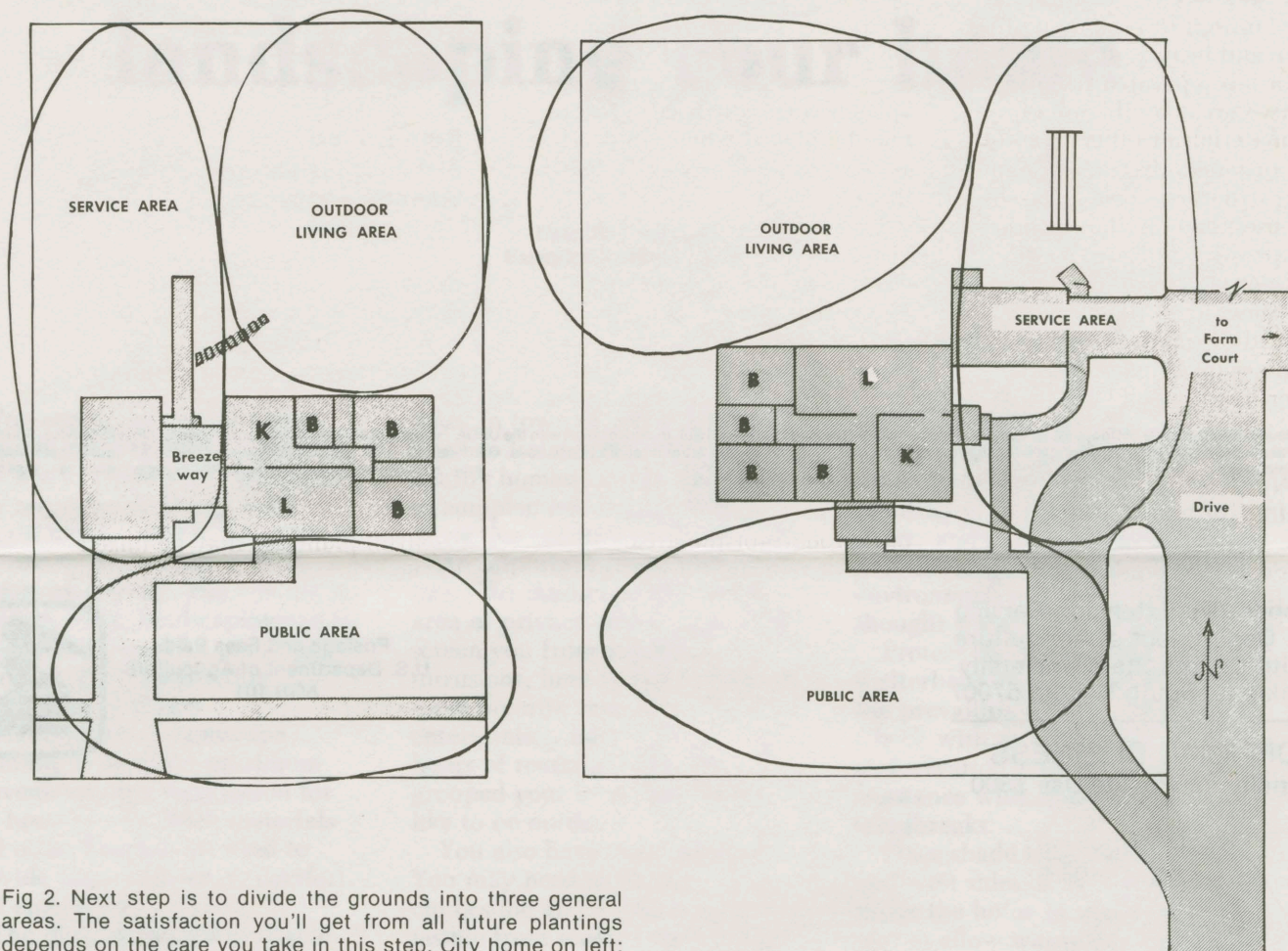


Fig 2. Next step is to divide the grounds into three general areas. The satisfaction you'll get from all future plantings depends on the care you take in this step. City home on left; farm home on right.

orientation is crosswise to prevailing winds.

Plan the garden, play area, and other desired utility features in or adjacent to the back door or service area.

Step No. 2— Division of grounds

Divide the home grounds roughly into three general areas—the public, service, and private or outdoor living areas. A thorough study of your sketch will enable you to visualize the appropriate divisions (Fig 2).

The **public area** is usually considered to be the front yard or approach area.

The house should have appropriate doorway and corner shrub plantings. There may also be a few shrub plantings at other areas of the foundation, depending on the house plan. Use shade trees for framing the front view of the house, and specimen plantings such as evergreen or flowering trees for accent, color, and interest.

The **service area** usually includes the back door, and work and garden areas. It may include utility items such as clotheslines, delivery area, garage, drive, walks, and sand box or other play area for children.

Plantings here can include shrub borders to separate the service area from the other two

areas and to serve as a screen for undesirable views.

By no means does this area need to be drab. You can include plant materials such as shade and ornamental trees and corner, doorway, and foundation shrub and flower plantings.

The **private or outdoor living area** is the remaining space after the public and service areas have been designated. This area usually includes the back and/or side yard.

The outdoor living room or recreation area may include a patio, deck, pool, fireplace or portable grill, picnic tables, and other lawn accessories. Space can also be planned for play or recreational activities.

This area requires considerably more plantings to provide desired privacy and beauty. It can be more or less separated from the other two areas by the use of plant materials or other types of screen or fences. Shade trees and desired structures (decks, gazebos, birdhouses) can also be included in the plan for this area.

It is not always possible to define these ideal three areas of your yard distinctly, but it does help to organize space in this manner if you possibly can.

Step No. 3— Planning for shade trees

Shade trees should provide shade for the home, yard,

driveway, patio, deck, parking area, and for the private or outdoor living area at the desired times of the day and year. Specimen trees of special interest may be placed where they can be enjoyed as a view from inside the home.

Don't forget the wintertime view, which should include some evergreens and perhaps some plants that attract birds.

Trees may also be placed in the public area—at the sides and forward of the house—to frame the residence. Other trees can be placed on the boundaries, along the parking strip, or at the rear of the property to serve as background for the area.

Select trees that are in good scale with the size of your house.

Use both deciduous and evergreen trees for year-round color, interest, and enjoyment.

Step No. 4— Planning for shrubs, flowers, and vines

Shrubs, both evergreen and deciduous, can be used as doorway, corner, and foundation plantings; in screens, borders, or hedges; and as a background for flower borders. Shrub screens are often used to help divide the home grounds into three general areas or to close off undesirable objects or views.

Shrub plantings may be mixed in type and size. It is better to use several plants of a few kinds

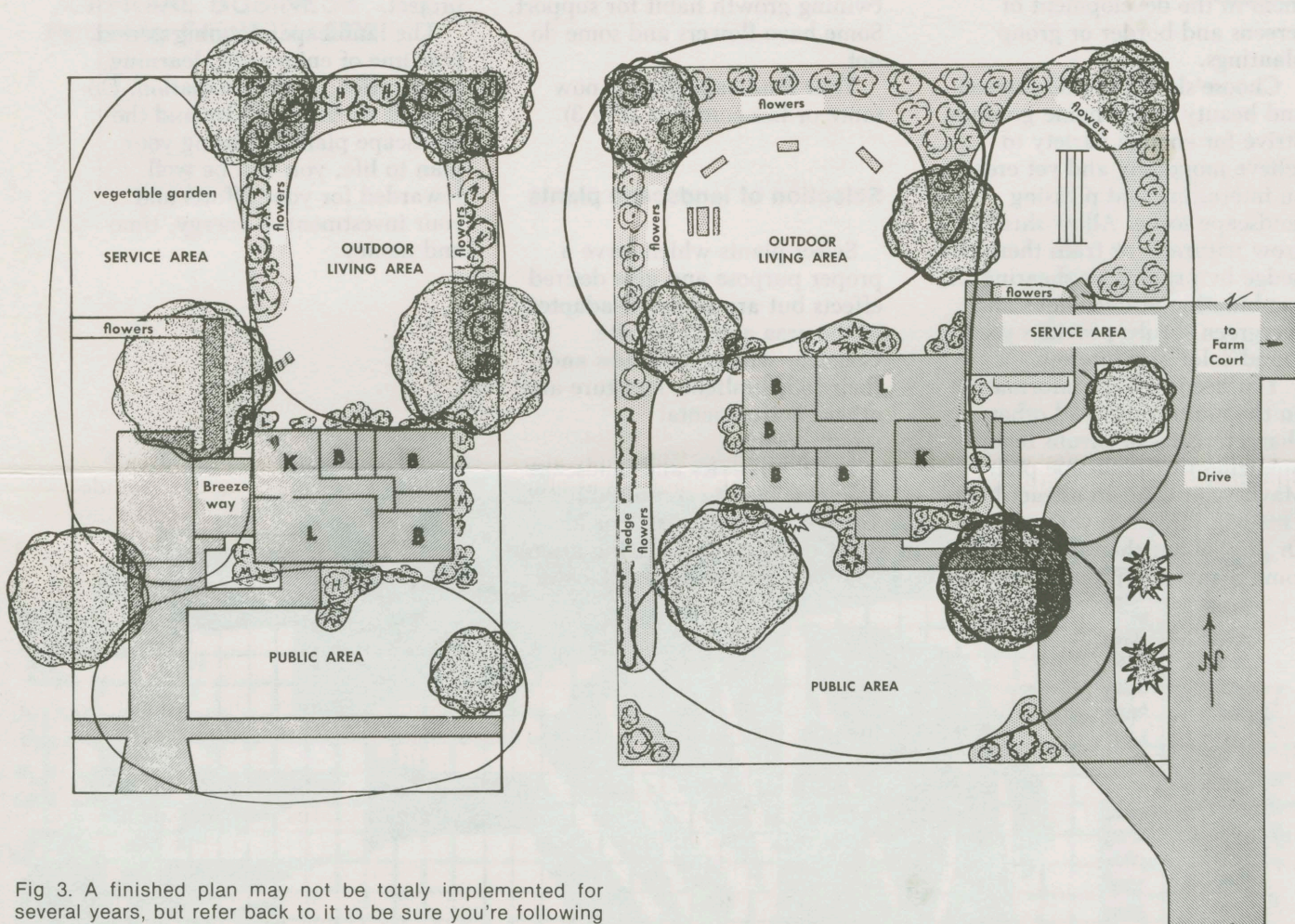


Fig 3. A finished plan may not be totally implemented for several years, but refer back to it to be sure you're following good landscaping principles whenever you plant. City home on left; farm home on right.

rather than one or two plants of several kinds.

A most important use of shrubs is for foundation plantings to tie the lawn area and the home together and to accent good (or cover up undesirable) features of the house. The appearance of the home and grounds can be either improved or damaged, depending on the selection and placement of the various shrub plantings.

Low and medium-sized shrubs will add emphasis to doorways. Taller shrubs usually give a good effect at the corners of the house or where there is a large area of bare wall. Ground hugging shrubs may be used under low windows and in areas where taller ones might interfere with vision or with convenience or where grass is not practical. Medium growing shrubs can be utilized in areas where taller or lower ones are not suitable, or in combination with them in the development of screens and border or group plantings.

Choose shrubs to add interest and beauty to the home grounds. Strive for enough variety to relieve monotony and yet create an interesting and pleasing landscape scene. Allow shrubs to grow naturally or train them to a hedge by pruning or shearing. A combination of deciduous and evergreen shrubs provides year-round color and interest.

You need to have information on the mature size and other characteristics of shrubs before finalizing the landscape plan. Maybe you want to attract birds. This will influence your choice. Or how about the fall color that some plants can provide?

Flowers can be used effectively in combination with foundation shrub plantings or border plantings. Flowers for cutting to use in bouquets such as gladiola and annual asters may also be grown in the vegetable garden area. Flowers in the lawn area should generally be used in marginal borders.

Vines give quick results, since they grow fast and cover large areas. They can be used on a trellis or wire where there is no room for shrubs, or they can be used near brick or stucco homes to add interest to the walls. Vines may also be planted as a ground cover or as a covering for other features in the home surroundings.

Choose vines for the specific purpose for which they are especially adapted. Some vines are self-attaching to walls, while others depend on a trellis and a twining growth habit for support. Some have flowers and some do not.

Your landscape plan is now more or less complete (Fig 3).

Selection of landscape plants

Select plants which serve a proper purpose and give desired effects but are also well-adapted to the area and to the site. Consider winter hardiness and their soil, sunlight, moisture and other environmental requirements.

Local nurseries and landscape designers can be consulted for assistance and advice. For ideas don't overlook just driving around your community and looking at

attractively landscaped homes. If you honestly admire their work, these homeowners usually will be delighted to give you hints and other benefits of their experiences.

Be sure to consider the mature size (height and spread) of the plants you select. Do not crowd wide growing shrubs in narrow areas between the house and the sidewalk, or use very tall trees near low rambler houses. Avoid planting tall growing shrubs under low windows. Do not mix fine textured plants with very coarse plant materials.

Most nursery, garden center and landscape design catalogs give adequate descriptions of the plants they list. You will be able to find many plant books, bulletins, and catalogs. Better yet, go to a nursery or garden center to see specimens of the actual plants and visit with their landscape designers about your project.

The landscape planning period is a time of enjoyment, learning, preparation, and anticipation. Do it well! As time goes by and the landscape plantings bring your plan to life, you will be well rewarded for your efforts and your investment of energy, time and money.

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